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**Exploring Possibilities for LGBT Youth Programing in Religious
Spaces: A Study of the Episcopal Church**

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Dedication

I foremost dedicate this thesis to my family. Thank you to my parents, Janet and Thomas Sawyer, for their love and support, and siblings, Brendan, Cameron, and Alyssa. Also a special recognition for my grandmother, Norma Sawyer.

I would also like to dedicate this to my numerous instructors at the University of Texas at Austin and Grand Valley State University, especially Dr. Kathleen Underwood, Dr. Danielle DeMuth, and the late Dr. Milton Ford. I have grown tremendously as an academic and individual from your instruction, mentorship, and encouragement.

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Abstract

Exploring Possibilities for LGBT Youth Programing in Religious Spaces: A Study of the Episcopal Church

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Abstract: This thesis weaves together scholarship in religious studies, sociology, social work, and psychology to explore the history and landscape of the Episcopal Church and youth ministries to argue for introducing ministerial programing interventions to support the needs of religious LGBT youth. As Christian denominations have grappled with questions and stances on sexuality and theology, few well-established religious traditions have engaged as committedly and as supportively as the Episcopal Church. Through examining the current arrangement and desired outcomes of youth ministry in the Episcopal Church, this thesis demonstrates how LGBT youth-specific outreach fits within the scope of engaging adolescents and the various factors that may promote or limit the development of such programs. As emerging evidence has shown, reconciliation of sexual minority and religious identity can protect against negative psychological and behavioral outcomes. Development of affirming and supportive groups

are a critical possibility for promoting the integration of a religious and sexuality identity, supporting LGBT youths' needs, and reducing LGBT stigma in the religious community and society at large.

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Chapter 1: History of Sexuality Debate in the Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church is a mainline Protestant Christian denomination and the United States-based member institution of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Over the last fifty years the Church has debated the topic of sexuality and adopted LGBT-affirming policies and positions. Although its inclusive liberal stance and progressive movements situates them at the forefront relative to most American religious traditions, it has placed them at odds with the more conservative Anglican Communion at-large (which includes regional Anglican Churches and the Church of England). For the Episcopal Church, the issue became relevant in the 1970s. With the arrival of liberation theologies and Episcopal approval of women's ordination, a schism emerged between conservative and progressive members (Bruner, 2009). This led to further fracturing of the Church within the United States and attention to questions about sexuality and the Church's actions by others in the Anglican Communion (Armentrout, 1986).

The push for LGBT inclusion in the Episcopal Church started with the publication of a monthly newsletter entitled *Integrity: Gay Episcopalian Forum* in November 1974 by gay church member Louie Crews of Georgia (Hill & Watson, 2006). In 1974, "the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs (JCCHA) formed a 'Task Force on Homophiles' ... 'to assure the continuation of the dialogue between the Church and leaders of the organizing forum for homophiles who are active members of the Episcopal Church [Integrity]'" (Hill & Watson, 2006, p. 39). By January 1975, Integrity USA became an incorporated advocacy organization for gays and lesbians within the denomination. Although it lacked institutional power, Integrity would become a

significant voice in the Church's dialog on homosexuality. The JCCHA met with Integrity in Atlanta that month and this discussion led to a resolution requesting that a formal study into ordination of gays and lesbians be approved at the 1976 General Convention, a triennial gathering of Episcopalian leaders that sets policies, doctrine, and liturgy. The following year, however, in a rapid move that would inflame theological tensions and risked forestalling progress on the matter, openly lesbian Ellen Barrett was ordained in New York (Bruner, 2009). At the 66th General Convention in 1979 a compromise resolution passed that recognized ordination for LGBT persons and reaffirmed "the traditional teaching of the Church on marriage, marital fidelity, and sexual chastity," thereby ensuring celibacy for all gay and lesbian church leaders (General Convention, 1980, p. C-93). For the time this was enough to implement progressive change while cushioning against deeper losses in both membership and trust.

Six years later, at the 1985 General Convention, sexuality reemerged in a resolution urging "better understanding of homosexual persons... as recognized by the General Convention in 1976"; the resolution passed (General Convention 1985, p. 207; Hill & Watson, 2006). By continuing dialog, the Church hoped to prevent further polarization as well as gain back conservatives into the fold by not forcing change. Adding sexual orientation to the Church's non-discrimination policy and requesting ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians was proposed at the 1988 Convention but failed (Hill & Watson, 2006). The 1988 gathering also resolved to explore the causes of suicide by lesbian and gay youth (General Convention 1988, p. 707). This resolution was the first action specifically on sexual minority youth issues by Church leadership and

indicated an interest in broadening LGBT topics addressed. As a follow up to this resolution and due to continued concern over LGBT youth suicides, a 1994 resolution was adopted to identify and incorporate educational materials for adults and youth about adolescent sexuality through the Department of Education for Mission and Ministry and Youth Ministries Office (General Convention 1995, p. 778). The other significant development of the 1994 Convention was a “Statement in Koinonia” or communion statement signed by 71 bishops in support of gay and lesbian church inclusion. This document stated that “homosexuality and heterosexuality are morally neutral” and argued gays and lesbians in committed relationships should be eligible for ordination (Integrity USA, 1994). While not a formal resolution, its impact was significant in the discussion of sexuality within the Church body and signified that a considerable liberal wing of Church leaders were ready to embrace gay and lesbian leaders. The 1997 General Convention was the first to address same-sex marriage rites and, while rejecting a proposal permitting blessing of same-sex couples, it opted to pass one requesting study on same-sex relationships, while also affirming traditional, heterosexual marriage. All these developments by the Episcopal Church would be criticized when brought before the worldwide Anglican Communion the following year (1998).

Discussion of the gay and lesbian inclusion before the entire Anglican Communion first occurred at the 13th decennial Lambeth Conference of bishops in 1998. Despite being a conference for promoting global unity, acceptance of gays and lesbians deeply divided the nearly 750 representatives from 164 countries along ideological and geographic lines. Demographic changes within the Communion are generally regarded as

leading to this irreconcilable division. Representatives of the United States, Canada, British Isles, and Australia, “nations that historically sent missionaries abroad, were outnumbered by the bishops from the Anglican churches of Africa, Asia, and Oceania” (Franklin, 1999, 262). The moral, theological, and political environments for Global Northern churches were significantly different from those of the Global South. To begin, bishops from the Global South found discussion of sexuality difficult because of conservative cultural conditions, social values, and theological understandings of scripture. Calls for open-mindedness would not be well received in their community. The pervasive traditional understanding of sexuality, gender, and morality that guided the societies from which they came were deemed incompatible with the liberal Northern agenda. Further, the threat of militant Islam that sought to convert Christians at almost any cost meant supporting LGBT rights would put them in greater danger (Kater, Jr. 1999).

Due to their majority representation, the Resolution on Human Sexuality adopted at the Lambeth Conference was more conservative than expected, to the dissatisfaction of liberal member institutions. Included were amendments pronouncing “homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture” and rejecting the “legitimizing or blessing of same sex unions or ordaining those in same gender unions” (The Lambeth Conference, 2005, p. 9). Even language was changed, replacing the word “homophobia” with “irrational fear of homosexuals” to satisfy conservative members (Franklin, 1999, p. 264). The final vote was of 526 in favor, 70 opposed, and 45 abstentions. Some dissenters voted in favor out of fear further amendment would cause greater harm to the Anglican

Communion (Kirkpatrick, 2008). Although resolutions from the Lambeth Conference are not legally binding, they do carry symbolic significance for member denominations. With the division now set on the global stage, the issue's saliency remained high and would come to a head again in short time.

Crestfallen but not deterred, the Episcopal Church resumed its pro-LGBTQ policymaking in the following years. The Cambridge Accord, a document produced by Steven Charleston of the Episcopal Divinity School at Cambridge, MA, emerged in response to the outcome of the Lambeth Conference and sought basic unity on some tenets about sexuality. These included that gays and lesbians deserve “to be treated with dignity and respect,” that they should not be denied human or civil rights, and that violence against sexual minorities cannot “be sanctioned by an appeal to the Christian faith” (Worldwide Faith News archives, 1999). The following year, the General Convention passed a resolution to “affirm and endorse the Cambridge Accord of October 1, 1999” (General Convention, 2000, p. 565f). Another resolution that year included concerted efforts to maintain cordiality by continuing dialog on human sexuality and recognizing disagreement on Church teachings on marriage. There was also a resolution passed to “establish a formal process for congregations to identify themselves as ‘safe spaces’ for [sexual minorities] and “work with counterparts within the Anglican Communion to encourage similar ‘safe spaces’ within the Communion” (General Convention, 2000, p. 245). This mix of maintaining dialog on human sexuality and recognition of scriptural disagreement while also expanding coverage on LGBTQ issues was significant and led to the case that renewed attention to the Church's actions: the

consecration of openly gay and partnered V. Gene Robinson to Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003.

The impact of Gene Robinson's election, along with the Anglican Church of Canada's move to bless same-sex couples, caused upheaval in the Anglican Communion. Denominations from the Global South who had asserted the immorality of such conduct and the sanctioning of same-sex relationships at Lambeth were displeased. In response, the leader of the Anglican Communion, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, called an emergency meeting of top representatives, called Primates, to address the crisis and avoid division. The "Lambeth Commission" was formed in October 2003 to investigate the tension over sexuality and answer a more inclusive question, "how does the Anglican Communion address relationships between its components part in a true spirit of communion?" (The Lambeth Commission on Communion, 2004, p. 5). Recommendations were released in the "Windsor Report" in October 2004.

The three key recommendations from the Report were for the Episcopal Church to express its regret over its action, for those who voted for Robinson's consecration to consider "whether they should withdraw themselves from representative functions in the Anglican Communion," and for the Church to effect a moratorium on consecration of candidates in same gender unions "until some new consensus in the Anglican Communion emerges" (The Lambeth Commission on Communion, 2004, pp. 53-54). Ultimately, while the Commission viewed the actions as significantly harmful to the Communion, its rebuke was rather mild, forgoing extreme punishment in favor of promoting healing, dialog, and the interests of Communion. Robinson remained bishop

along with those who elected him, and the Church agreed to the recommendation of halting future consecration of gay and lesbian priests as bishops. Conservative Episcopalians and leaders from Global South Anglican Churches did not believe the Report went far enough in upholding the tradition of strong Anglican Communion and scriptural interpretation (Kirkpatrick, 2008). The Windsor Report and its fallout constituted a landmark moment for the modern Episcopal Church and fed an expanding rift, which caused some more conservative American churches to disassociate with the denomination.

Episcopal leaders' reflection on the Church mission, per The Windsor Report's recommendation, was a challenging undertaking that produced eye-opening results. For the first time, Episcopalians became aware "that they are Anglicans as well as Episcopalians," members of a global communion with 80 million Christians that extends into Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Presler, 2009, p. 12). Under this new perspective, the attention of the worldwide communion and secular media brought understanding to leaders and lay members about global reconciliation and the value of unity. Domestically, internal discord continued, even hastened, among church congregations. Disaffected churches chose to disassociate with the denomination and join more conservative ones like the Anglican Church in North America. Such division caused concerns among leaders as membership continued to decline and reached below 2 million in 2013, and raised real questions of "whether different congregations can coexist within the same denomination" (Cadge, Olson & Wildeman 2008, p. 204). No better example of how the Church managed to find a workable solution to this quandary is in its adoption and

implementation of same-sex marriage sacraments in July 2015.

While the Windsor Report had settled actions on sexuality matters within the Church leadership for the time being, Episcopal ministries continued to engage affirmatively with LGBT issues nationally and locally. The legalization of marriage equality by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2015 brought a renewed attention for action on solemnizing same-sex unions. At the 78th General Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah, two related resolutions on the subject were passed. The first (2015-A036) removed language defining marriage as a union of man and women while the second (2015-A054) “authorized two new marriage rites with language allowing them to be used by same-sex or opposite sex couples” (Sheridan, 2015). These resolutions were compromises and had dissenters on both sides of the issue. One significant protective aspect of the adopted policy was respecting the conscience beliefs of local priests and regional bishops. Under the universalizing decree, it is “within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to solemnize any marriage” (General Convention, 2015). This meant that a bishop could bar all ministers in their region from conducting same-sex ceremonies and a priest could opt-out and still remain protected in status, so long as the minister referred the couple to a dioceses or priest who would perform the ceremony. Conservatives, beyond disapproving of same-sex marriage, worried progress was happening too quickly and that this would reignite division within the Church and Anglican Communion.

In September 2015, a meeting of the 38 global primates was called by Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, for January 2016. Due to the changes in marriage rites

liturgy by the Episcopal Church, its fate within the Communion was in question and there was additional pressure as to how the Communion should respond. As a result of this meeting, the Episcopal Church was allowed to remain in the Anglican Communion, but banned from representation on key bodies and voting on any doctrine or polity issues for three years. Welby asserted these sanctions were “consequences” for being out of the line within the Communion, not punishment (Sherwood, 2016). Even after these actions, Welby voiced his support for LGBT persons and apologized for past and ongoing “hurt and pain... that the church has caused and the love that [it] at times completely failed to show” (Sherwood, 2016). The ongoing effort to stave off fracturing and accommodate the diverse theological perspectives and policy desires of primates in the global Communion has proven challenging even for the leader of the Anglican Communion himself. A 2018 conference of primates was cancelled due to the difference and division over homosexuality and in hopes that more time will permit healing.

This latest meeting and the decision to impose three years of “consequences” on the Episcopal Church represents what continues to be an evolving and charged discussion within the Anglican Communion. Such response has constrained, but certainly not curtailed, the Episcopal Church’s institutional action. While the global Anglican Communion’s institutional members are a check on the Episcopal Church’s progressive LGBT agenda for leadership and liturgy matters, the Church has continued advocating for LGBT persons as a social justice issue. What the result of this continued debate will ultimately yield for the Church and Communion remains in question. Given that resolution to issues of sexuality have progressed at a sluggish pace, reconciliation seems

far off. Unless the Anglican Communion commits to confronting the issue directly and taking a definite stand, which is an unlikely scenario given the evolving composition of the Communion and growing influence of African churches within it, this debate and strain will persist.

Chapter 2: Episcopal Engagement and Leadership in Sexuality Subjects

The Episcopal Church has continued to be involved in LGBT issues despite the ongoing turmoil and debate within the Anglican Communion. Leaders on the national and local levels have been integral shapers of LGBT-supportive policies and politics in their respective capacities. As members and representatives of the church body, their leadership at multiple levels on political and nonpolitical matters demonstrates both an understood personal duty and reflects institutional values. Their guidance gives credence to the notion that they embody and spread a social justice gospel in word and deed as part of a theological religious duty. From petitioning and lobbying in the halls of Congress to clergy sermons and ministry, leaders' action on LGBT issues uses a number of tactics.

As part of the Office of Government Relations (OGR), the Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN), advocates at the national level to influence political decision makers on a number of foreign and domestic social justice issues. Among the LGBT political issues the Church is concerned about are inclusive non-discrimination protections, hate crimes legislation, and a federal Constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage (Van Geest, 2008). As recently as a July 2015, the Church was advocating for passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which would prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (Montgomery, 2015). While lobbying in Washington DC for laws benefiting the LGBT community has been the primary avenue for affecting change, it has not been the Church's only tool (Djupe, Olson, & Gilbert, 2005). The Church joined fellow Christian

and Jewish denominations in filing an *amicus curiae* brief for the 2015 Supreme Court *Obergefell v. Hodges* same-sex marriage case in support of marriage equality. It should be noted that despite the EPPN's lobbying with federal policy on LGBT and a range of other topics including refugee policy and immigration, denominational lobbies are granted few resources and viewed as less important than the Church's core activities, such as social work, outreach, and mission work (Djupe, Olson, & Gilbert, 2005). This perception is evident in the fact that there is less knowledge about the Church's lobbying efforts in Washington among clergy and few know what the OGR does. Outside Washington and public policy, the Church has taken public stances and action on topics and programs that address LGBT equality.

General Convention resolutions have served largely as symbolic gestures under which the Church's position on LGBT rights is made publically clear. Although the impact of these declarations is hard to measure given the role of other influences and interest groups that contribute to a bill's passage, they further demonstrate the Church's status as a denomination dedicated to social justice through the scope of gospel values. In 1994 the Church passed a resolution calling upon municipal, state, and federal government bodies to approve measures extending benefits to gay and lesbian couples and opposing state or federal Defense of Marriage Acts (General Convention, 1995, p. 282). This resolution was reaffirmed in 2006 with an added line acknowledging "the Episcopal Church's historical support of gay and lesbian persons as children of God and entitled to full civil rights" (General Convention, 2007, p. 704). The position's consistency and timely issuance speaks to just how resolute and attentive the Episcopal

Church has remained on matters that concern the sexual and gender minority community. Another LGBT topic that the Church took a stance on was the Boy Scouts of America's ban on openly gay youth and adult members, which survived a Supreme Court challenge in 2000. A 2000 General Convention resolution urged the Boy Scouts to accept members without consideration of their sexual orientation and encouraged churches hosting or chartering Scout units to have open dialog with adult leaders, scouts, and parents about discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (General Convention, 2001, 338). This resolution signified an interest in persuading other institutions to adopt LGBT inclusive policies, and also expanded the target to private organizations. As the Boy Scouts changed their policy to accept LGBT youth in 2013 and adult leaders in 2015, the impact of the Church's open support is hard to assess directly or independent of larger social movement towards claiming LGBT rights over the decade. Resolutions have not been the only source of LGBT-supportive messages; financial support has been provided to gay and lesbian organizations and initiatives.

The United Thank Offering (UTO) is a collection of offerings distributed to work supporting the mission and ministry of the Episcopal Church; giving for LGBT areas has grown over the years. In 1990 a partnership was formed with the organization Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) in response to the Church's 1988 resolution to study causes of suicides among LGBT youth. The UTO provided financial assistance to develop Phase One of PFLAG's 3-part "Respect All Youth" national program. This initiative developed informational materials to increase awareness of issues that contribute to youth suicide and outreach to leaders of youth organizations, including

religious groups, to address the topic (L. Smith, 1990). While the first LGBT-related financial giving by the UTO for a national cause, since 1975 there has been support for other, localized projects including Norfolk, Virginia's "Urban Outreach Ministry" to address the pastoral needs of LGBT persons, and "Oasis Ministry," the LGBT ministry of the Episcopal Dioceses of Newark, New Jersey (Episcopal Church, 2016). Grant making by the UTO has strengthened the Church's connections to national and community LGBT ministry and secular programs. While the national church has elevated LGBT issues through lobbying and giving, the most direct messaging to parishioners and source of community involvement has come from parish ministers.

Local clergy hold the most significant role and influence in supporting and advocating LGBT issues to parish members and carrying out the Episcopal Church's work in forging relations and understanding between the faith and LGBT communities. The two primary roles taken by church leaders in promoting gay and lesbian issues are as advocates and facilitators (Cadge & Wildeman, 2008). Facilitators "create congressional spaces in which people can learn and speak honestly about homosexuality" and are "motivated primarily by a desire to educate" and have members think critically; facilitators suggest that fear about sexuality and LGBT people is the cause of lack of dialog (Cadge & Wildeman, 2008, p. 589). This approach involves seeking multiple opinions on the issue and is more popular among church leaders as it allows them to deflect conversation from themselves and their opinion on the contentious subject. In comparison to the education outcome of facilitators, advocates desire change within the congregation, denomination, or community. Advocates start by stating their position and

attempt to convince others with the ultimate goal of changing the church and society to be more welcoming. They may do direct or indirect advocacy by holding programs or events to engage members around sexuality and faith such as inviting LGBT guest speakers or hosting study groups with LGBT related material to digest. These religious leaders believe their role includes pushing members to consider the subject of sexuality. These strategies for action are important in understanding how clergy promote LGBT topics to their congregants. As valuable as the facilitation, however, is the motivation for leaders engaging in these discussions on sexuality in the first place.

Interest in a socially relevant gospel message is moderately high within mainline Protestant denominations and comes from both leaders and members. Many Episcopal ministers, particularly supportive ones, view it as a responsibility, among all the other duties they fill, to be outspoken on social issues, including homosexuality, to their congregants (Cadge, Lyleroeher, & Olson, 2012). For mainline ministers, this role of being a vocal advocate or leader on contentious issues is driven foremost by their modernist orientation toward a social gospel (Guth, Green, Schmidt, Kellstedt, & Poloma, 1997). Clergy's opinion on social issues is guided by theological beliefs rather than a particular political viewpoint. This leads them to frame acceptance of sexual minorities as a moral issue instead of a political one (Van Geest, 2007). When discussing the issue with those who disagree ideologically, the discourse focuses on fairness instead of who is 'right' (Otis, 2004). In addition to leaders approving of LGBT sexuality and preaching being seen as a personal duty, parishioners self-select into the denomination based on ideological and spiritual alignment with their values and sometimes switch from

the faith tradition they ‘inherited’ from their parents to do so (Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Sexuality therefore is a symbolic issue and ‘litmus test’ that affirms their decision to be a part of the church, a factor of which leaders are well aware and can appeal to (Olson & Cadge, 2002, p. 158). Further, mainline Protestant parishioners are more liberal on the issue of gay rights than clergy but church leaders are more liberal on other issues and overall (Guth et al., 1997). This progressive outlook on sexuality issues by both mainline clergy and church members exemplifies the notion that shared ideological beliefs draws congregants to select denominations that share those values. Therefore, it is uncertain how necessary leaders may view preaching about accepting LGBT sexuality to the converted is; however, raising the issue does give parishioners a chance to hear arguments rooted in theology rather than secularism. In addition to social justice being of importance to both sides of the pulpit, the local environment and leaders’ personal beliefs also contribute to determining whether LGBT topics will be discussed to any degree.

The personal beliefs of Episcopal priests on LGBT sexuality shape their engagement in the subject in the church and local community contexts. A minority of parish leaders, in recognition that there is ongoing controversy and internal disagreement, resist talking about sexuality publically at all. They do not want to be seen as imposing their opinion and possibly alienating current lay members (Cadage, Lyleroeher, Olson, 2012). Downplaying the issue’s importance as a church matter is another strategy used by some leaders to avoid having to discuss sexuality topics with members, regardless of personal beliefs (Cadage & Olson, 2002). However, this approach is more likely used by those with a different perspective than their respective congregation than those with the

clear support of members. Alternatively, Episcopal leaders who hold personal beliefs that LGBT topics are about justice, rights, and equality more strongly believe it should be the church's duty to confront these difficult subjects with members. LGBT-supportive leaders are likely to view sexuality as an innate characteristic than social construction (Cadge, Lyleroeher, & Olson, 2012). It is therefore unsurprising some clergy draw parallels with the Episcopal Church's role in the 1960s civil rights movement to justify personal and church engagement. These leaders' express admiration at the progress that has been made on gay rights and have concerns about homophobia in America. Some clergy are less apologetic about their support and feel a calling to outwardly advocate for LGBT issues regardless of any internal opposition (Cadge & Wildeman, 2008). The strength of a leaders' personal position on the topic and view relative to the congregation's is an important factor in understanding whether there is local engagement of LGBT topics at all and further shape what kind of actions are taken.

Local church leaders publically express support for sexual minorities inside the church in various forms. This role is certainly not new for clergy as they have long used the pulpit to speak about family issues and influence members about how they should live, view, and respond to moral issues. Sermons "provide a way to reach a large number of people quickly and efficiently" and function to make scriptural texts relevant for contemporary society through interpretation and examples (Cadge, Lyleroeher, & Olson, 2012, pp. 92-93). For some, LGBT sexuality is a prime subject for achieving this, but not all agree. Detractors view it as too confrontational, ineffective, and believe it is an improper use of the "bully pulpit." Instead, these leaders engage in open dialog with the

congregation, “believing it is ‘better to talk than to preach’ on the subject” (Cadge, Lyleroeher, & Olson, 2012, p. 97). An educational dialog-based approach reduces the risk of offending parishioners and allows them to reach a position at their own pace with a leader’s guidance. A leader’s decision to perform same-sex weddings, provided the overseeing bishop allows, has become another activity indicative of personal support and moral approbation. Finally, clergy may have their congregation join initiatives which recognize LGBT-supportive churches such as “Believe Out Loud,” which offers a transdenominational registry with standardized expectations for becoming welcoming and inclusive. Even less formal options such online directories for open and affirming congregations now exist to promote their congregation to prospective LGBT members. Efforts to be publically supportive of LGBT issues have occurred in different ways across Episcopal churches and target current members and the public to different degrees. Beyond the formal church body, clergy have leveraged their title to speak authoritatively in affirmation of LGBT rights in public.

Avenues for clergy to take the Church’s positions and strongly held personal beliefs on homosexuality public also present themselves outside their congregation. Activities such as signing a petition and participating in gay pride parades represent two ways clergy have become involved and show support for LGBT issues. Some of these actions are taken with lay church members involvement. These tactics allow the leader and congregation to be visible and integrate with the greater, secular and interdenominational community for a cause. Ultimately, it serves as a demonstration of their social justice values derived from spiritual and scriptural beliefs. Leaders also speak

publically through media interviews, often when the Church is in national spotlight like the 2003 confirmation of V. Gene Robinson as bishop (Cadge, Lyleroehr, & Olson, 2012). These provide clergy an opportunity to voice their personal opinion, but not all may feel it is required. The levels of explicit congressional support for each of these actions vary, but tend to be low. Some remain cautious about getting too far ahead of their members and losing their support. Clergy's actions towards advancing LGBT rights offer a chance to bring the church to the community, an important facet in the mission of all parishes, and demonstrate leadership and fellowship with members. While each ordained leader has particular abilities to influence and act on LGBT policy and issues, holistic examination of the Church's structure is the best tool to understand how the pieces fit together and produce different LGBT-supportive and LGBT-ambivalent outcomes.

The institutional arrangement of the Episcopal Church makes possible a significant amount of the engagement and disagreement on the contentious topic of sexuality across the multiple layers of stakeholders. The leadership and authority structure of the Episcopal Church is, not unsurprisingly, episcopal in form. Johnstone characterizes an episcopal polity as "authority proceed[ing] from the top down – from the heads of the denomination (pope, archbishop, bishop, and so on) down to local representatives" (2007, p. 346). This centralized organization is found in denominations where the average congregation size is large. Other denominations with episcopal arrangements are the Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran Church, and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (Sullins, 2004). There is a strong correlation

between episcopal governance and having public policy positions on sexual orientation issues (Van Geest, 2008). There are two explanations for this correlation. The first is that top-level decision makers are “insulated from lay opinion... and therefore not as attuned to potential conflict that may arise from their actions” (Van Geest, 2008, p. 341). The alternative reason is simply that religious groups with more centralized episcopal structures are those having “theological beliefs that propel them toward frequent political action” (Van Geest, 2008, p. 341).

There are compelling cases to be made for each explanation within the Episcopal Church’s handling of LGBT sexuality depending on a person’s perspective on the issue. On one hand, hierarchy promotes consistency in action and creates a unified front that can be leveraged more effectively than reliance solely on local congregational voices and resources. This can be seen in the work of the Episcopal Public Policy Network and the handful of General Convention resolutions supporting LGBT policies. However, decisions by elites may create division at the local level between those in support and those who oppose the stance. The clearest example of this is the existing ideological differences between bishops and clergy members on LGBT issues which creates a patchwork of taught theological perspectives and actions across congregations, made possible by the Church’s agreed upon tolerance for dissent among members. It is also possible that Church decisions may not filter through the bureaucracy to substantially impact clergy and laypersons in their work. LGBT proclamations and resolutions at the national level are less directives to local churches than expressions of what the Church as an overall institution thinks and also what related tasks it prescribes to support its

mission, though it may have the secondhand effect of influencing individual churches to act too. Finally, it must be recognized that local congregations may be more active on controversial issues than the larger denomination and this may not garner national publicity (Van Geest, 2008). Parish outreach and the level of engagement of local leaders on sexuality issues may extend beyond those activities mentioned, such as preaching on the subject within a supportive community environment and strong member interest. These operational and organizational differences matter, and within mainline Protestant denominations, and specifically the Episcopal Church, factor into internal and interchurch beliefs and actions.

Chapter 3: Youth Ministries: *Purpose, Programing, and Effects*

Youth ministry has been a cornerstone of Christian traditions for centuries and of mainline Protestant churches since the early 20th century. The goals of religious adolescent education are multiple and diverse, but tailored to the denomination's unique history and ecclesiastical beliefs. The desired outcomes of youth ministry are to deepen connection to spiritual texts, transmit theological tenets to enhance understanding of the faith and denomination, and guide personal maturity. Linked to this is also the hope that youth will continue in the faith as adults. Changes in curricular emphasis, youth participation in church groups, and the level of support for youth ministry within the Episcopal Church have profoundly shaped its operations and current state with differences between parishes in capability and capacity becoming more distinct.

As a member of the National Council of Churches, and formerly the International Council of Religious Education, the Episcopal Church's educational priorities and agenda for youth ministry are part of a larger history with similarly situated mainline churches. These churches' ministries were directly influenced by "an optimistic, liberal theology" that was incorporated into Christian education around the 1960s (Unger, 2015, p. 80). Being a member in this interdenominational fellowship can benefit a church's education curriculum by reducing the burden of developing one of its own, but also risks losing its particular ecclesiastical voice to a generic, nondenominational message of scripture and beliefs (Gillespie, 1987). These are important considerations when examining youth ministry and its place within the Episcopal Church polity.

Over the decades, the focus and purpose of youth ministry within the Episcopal Church has adapted in response to changing cultural and institutional values, and presumed youth interests. Until Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture* in 1847, youth ministry had been revivalistic, treating children as born without religious belief and needing conversion to the faith. Bushnell instead argued faith was innate by "the organic unity of the family" and that "children needed to be raised up into [it], not converted to it" (1847, p. 183; Unger, 2015, p. 80). This sparked the liberal Christian, education model found in mainline churches, one focused on a gradual development into the faith, rather than leading teenagers to a "crisis point at which they suddenly 'became' Christians" (Unger, 2015, 81). Although new in outlook, early religious education instruction still relied heavily on "rote memorization and traditional content," and replicated the authoritative, teacher-pupil dynamic found in the secular classroom (Gillespie, 1987, p. 67).

By the 1950s, the existing religious education program was recognized as unsuitable. The materials' lack of relevance to the lives of adolescents and its disconnect from issues of the modern era failed to excite and threatened teenage attendance. One leading figure in religious education remarked that the usual Sunday school program had "broke[n] about as many young Christians as it built" (Shrader, 1957, p. 101). The first curriculum to be employed generally was *The Church's Teaching Series* in the late 1940s. With this, the Episcopal Church became the first in the Anglican Communion to have an organized collection of contemporary teaching materials. In an effort to improve its education program and create a standardized curriculum for nationwide use, the

Church's Department of Christian Education developed the *Seabury Series* Teachers Manuals, which became the flagship curriculum for the Episcopal Church in the mid-1950s. The series provided curriculum material to cover education into adolescence with a "social gospel" message about "what it looked like to be a Christian in action, not just belief" (Unger, 2015, p. 83). Since one-third of parishes adopted the *Series*, its volume of use was interpreted as success. However, the *Seabury Series* was a source of dismay for teachers as it provided "a curriculum without any practical training for working with teenagers" and required classes for parents and godparents (Unger, 2015, p. 93). While there was a basic training program for adult leaders, it was only financially accessible to larger churches with budgets for youth religious education. Although regarded as one of the Episcopal Church's best resources for youth ministry, the challenges to widespread, national adoption led to its eventual abandonment in 1970.

The overdue issue of youth ministry received attention at the Church's 1967 and 1970 General Conventions, which shaped the Episcopal Church's youth ministries into its present structure and content. Across mainline churches, the social upheaval of the 1960s caused many "to question how they could reach an ever-changing youth culture" (Unger, 2015, p. 79). Changes implemented across Protestant denominations reduced the educational aspect of adolescent ministries, and instead treated them as emerging adults, mature enough "to become involved in decision-making and contributing to the affairs of the Church" (Unger, 2015, p. 82). The establishment of the General Convention Youth Program (GCYP) in 1970 attempted to elevate youth ministry through connecting it with the nationwide mission of the Church, rather than it serving as merely Christian

education. The GCYP intended to fund improvements in pastoral ministries to adolescents and empower youth in to participate in institution decision-making. With the responsibility for youth ministry now placed largely on local churches and dioceses, those who already had well-established programs benefited the most from the arrangement. Though well meaning, many local parishes found the program unhelpful due to lack of connection to any concrete educational curriculum or direction on how to minister to teenagers. Individual parishes may continue to struggle in offering youth ministry due to siloing of information and resources, and in turn feel they have no peers in the area of religious educational programing (Gillespie, 1987). Even more importantly, with a voice in the processes of the institution, adolescents lack the comprehensive education that they would have benefited from and kept them loyal to the denomination (Unger, 2015). These challenges in operating effective youth ministry are not unique to the Episcopal Church, and depend on several factors including the lack of strong institutional support and national structure.

The reality that “educational unanimity or coherence is not a major institutional value” in the Episcopal Church has caused issues for some congregations as it has exacerbated differences that already exist in parish capacity. The most apparent divide is between urban and rural congregations. Simply put, “larger congregations have more resources – of all sorts – than smaller ones” (Ammerman 2001, p. 6). Funds for supporting a youth ministry are less in smaller congregations and impact such factors as having a hired, trained leader. The presence of a full-time youth worker is valuable because they play a significant role in shaping their congregations’ youth ministry

programs (Goreham, 2004). Beyond their expertise in religious content and youth ministry, they provide consistency in leadership to build the program, including recruitment of lay volunteer youth workers. In addition to financial resources making a dedicated youth leader attainable, the ability to stay current in content and pedagogy is important for maintaining an active program (Goreham, 2004). Youth pastors spend most their time finding and developing new programs and activities since quality programs “translate into youth support for the denomination” (Severe, 2006; Ji & Tameifuna, 2011, p. 318). Further, the ability to provide training for leaders is needed for effective youth ministry and is more difficult to achieve in a siloed, parish-based arrangement. The local control structure of youth ministries that vary significantly by size and levels of support helps explain the current state and makeup of Episcopal ministry programs.

Inequality of resources and limited national oversight contribute to the condition of the Church’s youth ministry. Only 36% of Episcopal youth program leaders have seminary training or specialized education in religious studies. This percentage is much lower than most denominations, where 55 (Catholic) to 90 (Church of God) percent of program educators are trained (Hoge et al, 1982, p. 233). However, it should be noted that there is no significant difference in the desired outcomes of religious education programs between those who are volunteer-led and those run by religiously trained professionals (Hoge et al, 1982). Across mainline Protestant churches the average time volunteer lay leaders serve is 2.5 years (Roehlkepartain & Scales, 1995). Burnout and busy schedules remain “moderate challenges” to finding and keeping volunteer leaders (Goreham, 2011, pp. 346-347). This suggests program development may encounter

occasional transition periods and possibly hinder long-term growth. One solution to having limited resources is multi-church youth programs within and between denominations (Chromey 1990). The primary limitation this approach encounters, however, as previously stated, is the loss of a distinctive denominational message and possible poaching of members by fellow institutions. The accurate picture of Episcopal youth ministries is not clear, including the number of parishes that offer their own programs versus those who collaborate with other churches, but what is clear is that the national Church's hands-off approach is having an impact on what is delivered.

Beyond the institutional arrangement and any program weaknesses, the social and individual factors that contribute to youth ministry participation are significant. Parents' church attendance highly correlates to youth church attendance, and in turn youth ministry participation (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978). Both the desire of socializing their children into the denomination and "worrie[s] about the problem of adolescents in our society – especially sex, drug use, and misbehavior" for which parents "look to churches to help their children through these dangerous years" suggest reasons for parental encouragement of youth ministry engagement (Martin, White, & Perlman, 2003; Hoge et al, 1982, p. 243). This latter concern would also explain why moral maturity is such a high priority in youth ministries across denominations. Family tension was not found to significantly impact adolescent attitudes towards youth ministry, but does interfere with transmission of parental religious values (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978, p. 360; Johnson, 1973; Ellison, Walker, Glenn, & Marquardt, 2011). Peer group pressure was the most significant factor in church youth ministry participation. Most high school adolescents

will not participate unless their close friends do (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978). Positive attitudes towards youth ministries are strongly related with peer network participation and particularly strong peer relationships. The last notable contributor to youth group participation and program satisfaction is the quality of adult leaders. Specialized youth pastors and adult leaders who are approachable and understanding had a positive impact on youth's views of the denomination (Ji & Tameifuna, 2011). This translates into retention of youth for programs and for the denomination (Ji & Tameifuna, 2011). As representatives of the denomination and role models, the influence of quality leadership on instilling religious values should not be understated. These factors that drive participation in youth ministry are important for one main reason: involvement corresponds to adult church membership (O'Connor, Hodge, & Alexander, 2002). In sum, parents, peers, and pastors' engagement of youth through age-appropriate ministry contributes to them remaining active and having a positive attitude toward the denomination.

The level of involvement in youth ministry varies across denominations and mainline Protestant churches have considerably lower levels than their Evangelical brothers and sisters. Nearly half of all adolescents regularly participate in religious organizations through church attendance or youth groups, and often both. For Episcopal youth, 21% participate weekly in church youth programs, 10% attend every 1 to 2 months, and 40% have never done so (T. Smith, Denton, Faris, & Regnerus, 2002). Other mainline Protestant denominations have similar breakdowns, while Mormons and Evangelicals have higher proportions of weekly youth attendance. Weekly adolescent

youth group participation decreases with age, but most are not leaving outright, simply attending less frequently (T. Smith, Denton, Faris & Regnerus, 2002). Competition for youth's time including academics and athletics are a moderate to high challenge for youth group retention (Goreham, 2004). For mainline denominations' youth groups in rural areas, 1 in 4 "participate regularly in ecumenical youth programs" and it should be expected that participation rates are greater in urban areas (Goreham, 2004, 345). This portrait of youth ministry suggests that while youth groups are moderately popular overall, there are still two-fifths of Episcopal youth not participating at all. This should be of concern to the Church.

The goals of youth ministry vary by denomination and are determined largely by their ecumenical outlook. Baptists with "born again" experience as a goal for members and scriptural literalism viewpoint have different priorities and wish to instill different values than Catholics who are interested in universalizing the faith through Christian Fellowship, for instance. For Episcopal youth leaders and parents, the most desired outcomes for youth are "moral maturity" and the importance of the sacraments (Hoge et al., 1982). Across all denominations, moral maturity, the fostering of healthy life habits rooted in moral decision making and recognized self-worth, ranked as a high priority, outranked only slightly by conversion to the faith in Evangelical branches. Understanding the importance of baptism and communion, and participating in the latter frequently, is the second highest priority issue for Episcopal leaders. The only faith that prioritized the sacraments in youth ministry more is Catholic. Conversion or being "born again" is the least important sought outcome in Episcopal youth ministry, similar to Catholics and

other mainline Protestant denominations (Hoge et al., 1982). Since the importance of being “born again” is inversely related to leaders being relativistic about religion, this lack of attention to the subject in non-Evangelical churches comes as no surprise. Finally, promoting social justice values in youth ministry is a low priority across all Christian faith traditions, even those denominations whose theological views are oriented towards it, like the Episcopal Church. The reason for this is unclear. Leaders may find the subject inappropriate for youth, but suitable for high school members. It is doubtful teachers are entirely disinterested in promoting social justice and applied theology for the teenage members of their congregation (Hoge et al., 1982, 253). Overall, the Episcopal Church’s youth ministry goals are similar to that of Catholic and other mainline Protestants and represent a strong interest in developing youth into moral citizens and conscientious Christians.

Youth ministry is a key component for providing religious education and ecumenical programming. Churches of all denominations have a strong incentive to invest in youth programming since participation in youth groups is positively connected with expected and actual continued attendance in church service (Snell, 2009). Local churches can be prepared and best serve their youth members through awareness of social and individual factors that affect participation as well as best practices for youth ministry. The Episcopal Church’s desired outcomes for youth ministry match its Protestant tradition and compares to other mainline denominations. However, institutional missteps have caused many of the challenges currently experienced. The lack of a formal denominational education curriculum and clear vision from the national Church is a

recognized weakness. By leaving it up to local churches and dioceses to organize their own youth ministry, those with greater resources will continue to provide more programing and have the necessary tools and staff to support growth. In the meantime, smaller churches can improve their youth ministry through collaboration. Only through addressing institutional issues will all Episcopal youth ministry programs thrive and the real fear of losing teens due to lack of programing lessen. For better or worse, one thing is certain, structural change is overdue in Episcopal youth ministry.

Chapter 4: LGBT-Affirming Youth Groups in Religious Contexts

Religious leaders play a role not only in promoting LGBT tolerance among congregants, but also as an empathetic voice for those looking for spiritual guidance on matters of sexuality. Priests, when conducting pastoral ministry, fill a role that can best be characterized as “amateur counselors” (Dahlberg, 1960). Here they occupy a strategic place close to the home but family and outside the position of psychiatrist or physician where personal problems can be attended to theologically. For especially religious participants, clergy’s teaching and authority on spiritual matters is valued most highly. Guidance on questions of sexuality can be particularly useful for adolescents since messages from secular culture tend to differ from traditional religious teachings on the subject (Dykstra, 2013). As Dykstra argues, it is no longer optional for church youth leaders to address the topic of sexuality given its high social value (2013). LGBT adolescents in particular are susceptible to internalizing negative messages about sexuality, including anti-homosexuality scriptural interpretations, from peers, family, and religious leaders (Yarhouse, Tan, & Pawlowski, 2005). Various models of religious-oriented affirmative therapy in pastoral care and counseling settings have been shown to be effective in bridging LGBT and spiritual identities for members (Bozard, Jr. & Sanders, 2011; Lassiter, J. M., 2014). Sexual minority young adults have cited support from clergy as a factor in aiding religious and sexual identity integration and one-third of respondents in one study sought help from religious leaders during this process (Dahl & Galliher, 2009; Schuck & Liddle, 2001). To assist LGBT individuals, leaders can promote alternative perspectives to Bible passages on human sexuality, offer coping tools

that are rooted in Christian tradition and praxis, and share personal experiences and perspectives that are contextually relevant for sexual minorities. Clergy have a strong effect on how LGBT youth perceive themselves and clergy can impact their views on the denomination itself (Foster, Bowland, & Vosler, 2015). In addition to clergy directly helping LGBT individuals in religious and sexuality identity integration, leaders who create an LGBT-supportive church climate improve the well-being of sexual minority youth members.

Significant research indicates supportive religious environments have positive impacts on LGBT youths' mental health and well-being. Sexual minority youth living in communities with a religious climate supportive of homosexuality report lower rates of alcohol abuse and unprotected sexual intercourse (Hatzenbuehler, Pachankis, & Wolff, 2012). This indicates that religious ecological factors positively affect health risk behaviors which are typically greater among gay youth than their heterosexual peers. Similar effects are found for LGBT individuals when looking specifically at their religious behavior. LGBT youth belonging to an affirming denomination reported significantly lower levels of depressive symptoms compared to those in denominations opposed to same-sex sexuality and nonreligious youth (Gattis, Woodford & Han, 2014). Further, these sexual minority members report greater spirituality and decreased internalized homonegativity, which contributes to better overall psychological health (Lease, Horne, and Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005). As Rodriguez & Ouellette indicated, a church that recognizes and affirms homosexuality has high levels of gay members who integrate, rather than compartmentalize, their spiritual and sexual identities (2000).

Identity integration has been shown to improve resiliency in responding to negative life stressors from within and outside the religious community (Levy, 2012). The emerging recognition of denominational differences within the literature indicates sexual minority youth experiences are more complex than the traditional framing of incompatibility between Christian beliefs and LGBT identity that lead to negative health outcomes. This information strongly supports the development of ministries that support and address the needs of LGBT members, a case that has been made across religious communities.

Arguments for affirmative ministry that bridge socially marginalized LGBT youth and faith communities have taken place for decades across Christian denominations. As Episcopal priest and religious writer Morton T. Kelsey argued in 1968, “The [Christian] church ought to provide a place where the confused youth can discuss with openness his fears and doubts and aspirations, without censure or prejudice” (p. 76). At a time when homosexuality was seen as a menace by many Christian faith traditions, Kelsey uses scripture and homily to promote the notion that the church should be welcoming and inclusive, even to those who cannot or do not want to change their sexual orientation. More recently, even Catholic ministers, a more socially conservative group, have articulated the need for official ministry with sexual minorities using the language of the faith’s mission and tenets (Gabriel, 2002). This approach views sexual minority status as an important identity component and downplays the discussion of sexual conduct to make the case less provocative. Billups, also writing in the Catholic context, suggests a “renewed praxis with young people” and “the need for a bridge between LGBQ youth and the church” (2009, p. 41). Through educating clergy on how to work with LGBT

persons to offer informed guidance and affirm their identity, the church can become a safe space for young people to raise their problems and be honest about their identity without fear of persecution. These calls for understanding by religious leaders originate primarily from a belief that the denomination has a role in connecting the social and political with the theological. These arguments can be compelling to other faith leaders due to a shared Christian vocabulary in spite of differing ideological views. The case for LGBT affirming ministry has also gained the attention and support of those in the medical community.

Psychologists have taken an interest in supporting religious institutions' efforts to provide affirmative ministry to LGBT persons. The APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation has encouraged a range of professionals and groups, including religious leaders and faith organizations, to collaborate in "promot[ing] the well being of sexual minorities" (2009, p. 122). Since therapists often feel religious topics are "out of their expertise, or outside the reach of psychotherapy" and clergy are not specially or significantly trained in working with LGBT persons, this dialog will help both sets of professionals serve religious sexual minority clients more effectively (Mann, 2013, p. 208). It will make the significant knowledge on affirmative LGBT counseling developed from social work and psychology available to ministers who work providing spiritual guidance to marginalized adolescents. Further, cross-institutional collaboration can create dialog across local religious institutions and positively influence attitudinal trends toward sexual minorities (Meanley, Pingel, & Bauermeister, 2016). Recognition by medical professionals of the comparable work religious leaders do with LGBT youth

is significant because it opens up possibilities for information sharing about best practices in counseling for clergy and a vocabulary and resources to speak on faith issues for medical professionals. It has been suggested that “gay-affirming religious groups may provide forums for community-based support groups and psychoeducational panels that could work toward decreasing homophobia in the community-at-large” (Yakushko, 2005, p. 139). Publications on practice with LGBT Christian youth are beginning to reflect an increased awareness of their needs and ways religious institutions can support these members’ through engagement beyond one-on-one pastoral counseling.

Group therapy has been a longstanding approach to help LGBT adolescents, but only recently has this approach been promoted for use by religious leaders. Professionally led and peer-run social group therapy in secular settings such as schools, community centers, and counseling offices have been recognized as providing “invaluable opportunities for socialization and the building of self-esteem and identity” for youth (Peters, 1979, p. 67). Given that group therapy’s aim to build maturity into adulthood, provide resources to combat anti-gay stigma, and affirm the diversity of sexual identity overlap to some degree with the targets of youth ministry and the moral values held by LGBT-supportive clergy and religious denominations, these churches appear well suited to provide space for such programming. Yarhouse and Beckstead found group therapy specifically targeting sexual orientation and religious conflicts can provide clients with “opportunities to normalize their attractions and conflicts [and] experience a sense of belongingness” (2009, p. 115). In working through initial conflict, participants in affirming church programs often express a reduction in the feeling of shame, which can

be high among distressed faithful youth. Further, religious-based social support spaces allow for the development of a peer community where meaning can be made out of personal stories, differences of experiences can be respected, and commonalities recognized (Yarhouse, 2008; Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2009). Spiritual activities and seeking social support are positively associated with self-controlling stress and positive reappraisal too (Yakushko, 2005; Folkman, Chesney, Pollack, & Phillips, 1992). Even youth attendees who claimed never to have experienced personal conflict between their sexuality and religious upbringing benefited from information on how to discuss their sexuality with religious family members (Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2009). Group therapy to address intrapersonal tensions between religious and LGBT identities has shown a number of significant psychological benefits. Religious leaders who adopt such social programing in their parish increase its availability to youth in their church and the surrounding area. This is significant particularly in cases where other forms of social support, be it in schools or community centers, are unavailable. Making the church space a place where LGBT youth can feel safe and integrate their sexual and religious identities will also reflect positively on the denomination, its leaders, and its members' supportive values (Kubicek et al., 2009). In addition to acknowledging that religious sexual minority youth can benefit from group programing, there are also general recommendations for religious leaders looking to implement this type of support program in their church.

Proposed suggestions for clergy developing and running social group programs for LGBT youth are informed by past work with sexual minority adolescents in religious and secular settings as well as the experiences of religiously oriented youth. Heterosexual

religious leaders may benefit from engaging gay clergy in dialogs on how to support LGBT youth or involve them directly in programing to make evident that sexuality and religious identity integration is possible (Kubicek et al., 2009). A knowledge and understanding of “gay theology,” which “specifically values gay men and lesbians of the Christian faith, and recognizes their spiritual needs” can be useful in providing a message that is both LGBT-affirmative and Christian-positive (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000, p. 335). Clergy members’ grasp of gay theology allows them to better serve LGBT youth since guidance on reading and interpreting scriptural texts, particularly those traditionally viewed as condemning homosexuality, has been shown to allow sexual minority youth the opportunity to contextualize their historic meaning and “gain new perspectives that further aid [their] identity integration” (Dahl & Galliher, 2009, p. 107). The ability to incorporate and facilitate conversations on scripture to empower LGBT youth in their faith is equally as important as an awareness of youth’s potential to be agents of change in their own right, as promoted in liberation theology and pedagogy (Hryniuk, 2005). This means making room for youth to express themselves, share struggles and successes in their integration process, and even question beliefs about faith. Partnering with local LGBT groups such as Gay-Straight Alliances and community centers can increase the reach of affirming religious programing and draw in attendees from across denominations who could benefit from such ministry (Meanley, Pingel, & Bauermeister, 2016). Finally, in order for religious intervention to be successful it must be “customized, culturally adapted, contextually based, collaborative and implemented at the community level” (Liboro Jr., 2015, p. 1212). Since LGBT Christian identity is not universal, attention to

intersectional factors such as rural-urban community environment, race, sexuality and gender identity must be considered (Woodell, Kazyak, Compton, 2015; Marshall, 2010). The “cultivation of a practical consciousness” through LGBT programing is in-line with the aims and interests of mainline Protestant youth ministry and organized sexual minority specific youth group programs allow clergy to initiate and facilitate conversations about sexuality and faith that ultimately affirms LGBT identity and puts forwards the view it is compatible with Christian religious beliefs (Hrynuik, 2005, p. 146). These recommended practices can help church leaders develop gay-affirming religious groups that is appropriate for the local culture, draws from existing community resources, and ultimately empowers youth. Further, this information can be particularly useful in articulating this work’s importance and potential impact to church members since this is a new area of social ministry and one where there is still debate around affirming LGBT identities within religious institutions.

Constraining forces that shape programing and outreach are necessary considerations for setting realistic expectations for new ministry programs with sexual minority youth. Despite the best efforts of denominations, adolescent years have always had lower than average involvement with religion and it is “unclear how many sexual-minority emerging adults are actually reached by progressive religious organizations’ efforts” (Ream & Rodriguez, 2014, p. 210). However, it should also be noted that LGBT youth do have access to greater freedom, mobility, and digital technologies to locate and attend supportive denominations and programing (Ream & Rodriguez, 2014). Clergy may be cautious to expend valuable social capital on LGBT group ministries since

sexuality is a divisive topic even within parishes. Churchgoers who accept hearing an inclusive gospel that affirms LGBT identity may not support progressing into developing and running specialized programming for sexual minority youth. If church leaders move too quickly to implement LGBT youth focused programming they risk possibly alienate existing church members (Dewey, Schlosser, Kinney, & Burkard, 2014). Therefore, it is important to inform and persuade skeptical members to support such initiatives. Slow steps are necessary to safely navigate the terrain of creating a ministry program targeted towards the needs of sexual minority youth as internal debate and division continue. Lack of financial resources at the local level can hinder development of LGBT programs. If there is already a challenge in supporting general youth ministry, extended youth programming targeting sexual minority youth is unlikely to happen. Ultimately it is important to realize “no substantive change in youth ministry has come out of academia” but rather will continue to be “a transaction between young people themselves or caring Christian adults and young people they perceive to be in need” (Senter III, 2014, p. 46). This quote suggests that ruminating on ministerial matters is of less significance than doing, but I believe academic writings, such as this thesis, should not be overlooked since analysis of theory alongside practice can start important dialog in support of action.

CONCLUSION: THE CASE FOR EPISCOPAL ACTION

Social support ministries have been an important, albeit secondary, focus of Episcopal parishes and, like youth ministry, these efforts are largely parish-based. While the majority of domestic social ministry has been issue-oriented and on conventional

concerns like hunger and homelessness, there “has always been a tension between those who are concerned about systemic change in the form of advocacy for major social justice concerns, and those who believe that religion and politics should not mix” (Rodman, 1990, p. 22). This argument presents both an opening for affirming LGBT youth-focused ministry to develop within Episcopal churches as well a case that it may not. However, since local concerns often drive parishes’ social outreach, it should seem plausible that LGBT issues make the agenda on occasion, especially when reports of at-risk youth homelessness or suicides make the news cycle. Leaders can use major events to draw attention to social problems and make the case for local involvement or intervention. Episcopal leaders who are already openly advocates for LGBT issues and create an inclusive church environment are more likely to have existing support from congregants, easing the process of introducing social ministry for sexual minority youth. Youth can also have an impact on promoting LGBT ministry as a cause or concern they wish their parish to address. Youth would become empowered as participatory members of the denomination, and feel their voice is recognized and appreciated, if given the opportunity to design and organize and component of the church’s social ministry. Further, since social and youth ministry is primarily parish-based and funded, leaders have somewhat wider latitude to experiment and try new approaches to engage new and current members than if an institutionally provided youth curriculum or mandated social ministry plan was in place. Supportive clergy within the Church are important shapers and drivers of adopting ministry geared towards sexual minority youth and change on LGBT issues more broadly, even as endorsement of homosexuality within the

Communion remains at a standstill. The history of affirmative engagement with sexuality in the Episcopal Church across its multiple institutional levels suggests LGBT youth ministry are not outside the realm of possibilities for parish-level engagement and would bring a significant benefit to area Christian denominations and secular therapist providers in the community-at-large. Ultimately, these programs reflect the social duty found within mainline Protestant church's theology to "engage in activities for change within the denomination and in society at large" (Ream & Rodriguez, 2014, p. 209).

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